

“We touch people’s lives, every day, in a thousand different ways around the world.”  
Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Janice L. Jacobs

## Bureau of Consular Affairs

### Office of American Citizens Services

Around The Clock. Around the World. American Citizens Services.



#### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO:

- Plan
- Making Reservations
- Travel Smart
- Accommodations
- Airlines

#### WHERE TO FIND US?

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[travel.state.gov](http://travel.state.gov)

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## Traveling with Disabilities

If you are a person with disabilities or are traveling with a person with disabilities, preparation before you go is essential to help you ensure that your travel will be accessible, safe and enjoyable. Individual countries have their own standards of accessibility for travelers with disabilities. Think about your needs throughout your whole trip and conduct research in advance. We recommend that travelers with disabilities review the information contained in the section above entitled [Planning Your Trip: Learn About the Places You Will Visit](#), consider the following tips, and discuss the trip with your health care provider.

### Know Before You Go

*The first consideration in traveling abroad is to understand the impact travel may have on you.*

**Plan:** Learn about planned stops and ask questions about services available. Consider the level of health care available and your local transportation needs. Contact [travel agencies and organizations that specialize in accessible travel](#). When making reservations, inform the travel agent or carrier of your disability and the equipment you use. In all cases, ask that your needs and requests be documented as part of the reservation, and take down the name of the agent. That way, if there is a problem, you may be able to quickly show that you are entitled to the service you requested.

**Making reservations:** Contact airlines, hotels, etc. and clearly state what assistance you require – more than just what type of disability you have. Confirm reservations in writing. Contact local tourist authorities to determine if public transport systems can accommodate your disability. Don’t assume that everything is accessible – ask to speak to someone who has actually seen the facility where you will be staying. Consider contacting [disability organizations overseas](#) where you plan to visit about your requirements.

**Travel Smart:** The additional physical activity undertaken during travel is strenuous, and sudden changes in diet and climate can have serious health consequences for the unprepared traveler, young and old. Allow ample personal time, whether to adjust to the current time zone or to enjoy another travel site.

**Accommodations:** Determine wheelchair access, to areas such as a swimming pool, public rooms, restaurants, bars, toilets, etc. and if any equipment you may need is available locally such as back rests, bathing equipment, hoists, ramps, and special mattresses. Determine if shopping and entertainment are accessible. Check with local U.S. embassies about rules and regulations regarding your assistive devices. Determine voltage requirements in each country, whether an adapter is necessary, and what the different plug configurations are.

**Airlines:** Travelers with disabilities should review the Department of Transportation pamphlets *New Horizons for the Air Traveler with a Disability* and *Plane Talk: Facts for Passengers with Disabilities*. Both of these publications are available at the Department of Transportation’s website <http://www.dot.gov>. Determine whether the airline you choose requires medical clearance. Check in early and label all luggage. Check toilet accessibility and find out whether

special dietary restrictions can be accommodated. Determine whether a wheelchair or other bulky devices require special handling and whether other assistive devices are required to be stored in your hand luggage. Most airlines allow you to pre-board with wheelchairs and electric scooters. Consider measures to safeguard the wheelchair or scooter during its time as cargo. Book direct flights when possible and make sure to allow enough time for transfers between planes and other forms of transportation. Inquire about what assistance may be available at the airport such as at check-in, throughout the terminal, and upon boarding and debarking. Make sure to inform the cabin crew of any potential problems or concerns you may have such as using a wheelchair, having to transfer from the chair to your airline seat. Consider whether you need a personal assistant. Arrange transportation to and from the airport. If you have a wheelchair, make arrangements in advance to have an accessible vehicle pick you up in your destination city.

If you have a hearing impairment and will require assistance at the airport, inform your travel agent or the airline company as soon as possible to make the necessary arrangements to assist you. You will not be required to remove hearing aids or the exterior component of a cochlear implant at security checkpoints. Please wear your hearing device while going through the metal detector.

You can also arrange for someone to help you at check-in, custom controls, and baggage check. Additionally, you can request that airline staff inform you personally as soon as information is announced regarding your flight. When you check in, confirm with the agent how you would like to be informed that your flight is ready for boarding and other pertinent information. The majority of public address systems at airports should include induction loop facilities, which will amplify the sound when you use the 'T' switch on your hearing aid. In many airports, text telephones and public telephones fitted with induction loops should be available.

When onboard the plane, inform the cabin crew of your impairment to ensure that you receive any important announcements during the flight. Information videos shown on the plane should have subtitles, and you may be able to use an induction loop to listen to public announcements. Some airlines will allow deaf passengers to board first so that the cabin crew can explain the safety procedures to them prior to the other passengers boarding.

### Health & Safety Information

A key resource for health information is the Travelers' Health page of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. Discuss with your health care provider the activities you have planned, your general physical condition, any immunizations that might be needed, and medications—whether prescription or over the counter—that you might need for your trip. Consider any effects the local topography or climate may have on you; if you are sensitive to altitude or humidity, for example, consult with your health care provider. Carry a letter from your health care provider, preferable on letterhead, describing your medical condition, medications, potential complications and other pertinent information. Determine health care availability where you will be traveling. Your doctor, health care provider, insurance company or the local embassy can provide the names and contact numbers of health care facilities at your destination. Make sure to carry medical alert information, preferably in a place that a health care provider or anyone who assists you will find easily (wallet card, necklace, or with your identification documents). Check to see if any natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or tsunamis occur at your destination and consider how these may affect you – consulting with your health care provider as necessary.

**Your Medication:** If you take [prescription medication](#), make sure you have enough to last the duration of the trip, including extra medicine in case you are delayed. Make sure to ask your pharmacy or physician for the generic equivalent name of your prescriptions in case you need to purchase additional medication abroad. Physicians and pharmacists abroad are more likely to be familiar with the generic name (also known as the chemical name) of medications. Pack your medication in your carry-on bag, since checked baggage is occasionally lost. Always carry your prescriptions in their labeled containers, not in a pill pack. Take a copy of your immunizations records along in your hand carry luggage.

**Health & Evacuation Services:** Make sure you have adequate and up-to-date [health insurance coverage while abroad](#), including coverage of medical evacuation (not covered by most domestic policies.) Obtaining medical treatment and hospital care abroad can be expensive, and medical evacuation to the United States can cost more than \$100,000.

Check with your health insurance provider to see whether you will be covered overseas, including in which countries and under what circumstances. Your health insurance provider may also require you to provide notification of your travel before you depart the United States and for any treatment before it's provided to determine if it is a covered service. Ensure that anyone traveling with you also has adequate insurance coverage. Note that U.S. Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States. The names of some of the companies offering short-term health and emergency assistance policies are listed on the Bureau of Consular Affairs website at [http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures\\_1215.html](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/brochures/brochures_1215.html).

### **Service Dogs & Assistive Equipment**

Some countries have restrictions on service dogs. If you intend to travel with a service dog, be sure to check on possible restrictions with the embassy or consulate of each country you will visit. If service dogs are permitted, learn about quarantine or vaccination requirements. Find out what documents are needed, including identification, international health certificates, rabies inoculation certificates, and translations of documents. Talk with your vet about tips for traveling with a dog. You may also want to ensure that hotels will accommodate your service dog, and that there will be an adequate area for the dog to relieve itself. Check on any other equipment policies for devices such as wheelchairs, portable machines, batteries, respirators, and oxygen. Have a maintenance check done on any equipment to ensure that everything is in working order before you leave. You may want to [research the availability of wheelchair and medical equipment](#) providers in the areas you plan to visit.

### **Emergency Contacts**

A secure way to maintain this contact information is to register at <https://travelregistration.state.gov>. Your information is stored securely and enables us to contact you, your family, or friends in an emergency as you designate. This will help us contact you if there is a family emergency in the United States, or if there is a crisis where you are traveling. In accordance with the Privacy Act, we will not release information on your welfare and whereabouts to others without your express written authorization. Hand carry a copy of your written itinerary and directions for where you wish to go. Leave a copy of the itinerary, airline tickets, credit cards, serial numbers of your traveler's checks, passport and contact details with a trusted family member or friend at home and carry emergency contact information for your family in the United States on your person. For both, include contact information for the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate at your travel destination(s). These can be shown to people who might be able to help you if you are lost.

### **Scams**

Financial scams originating from overseas are a real and growing problem. Individual U.S. citizens have lost considerable sums of money on these scams, ranging from a few hundred dollars to hundreds of thousands of dollars. While confidence schemes have long existed, the advent of the Internet has greatly increased their prevalence, and the Department of State receives daily inquiries from victims. Scams may involve internet dating, inheritance, work permits, overpayment, lotteries, and money-laundering. Beware of scams—scammers intend to get money from their victims by making the victims believe they will gain something of great personal value (financial gain, a romantic relationship, helping someone in trouble, the safe return of a friend etc.). Scammers operate primarily via the Internet, email, and phone.

For information about these scams and what you can do to protect yourself (or what to do if you are the victim of a scam), please review our [Fact Sheet on International Financial Scams](#).

## Useful Links

Medications: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/medications>

Traveling with a Ventilator: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/ventilator>

Travel Agencies Specializing in Disability Travel: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/link/abletravel>

Disability Organizations Overseas: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/link/onlinedirectories>

Wheelchairs and Assistive Devices: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/powerchairs>

Dialysis Centers Abroad: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/link/dialysisworldwide>

International Health Insurance: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/insurance>

Medications Abroad: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/medications>

Oxygen Abroad: <http://www.miusa.org/ncde/tipsheets/oxygen>

Air Travel Service Complaints & People with Disabilities: <http://airconsumer.ost.dot.gov/ACAAComplaint.htm>

Common Questions Regarding Travel for People with Disabilities: [http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/FAQ\\_5\\_13\\_09.pdf](http://airconsumer.dot.gov/rules/FAQ_5_13_09.pdf)

Flying with a Disability: <http://www.flying-with-disability.org/>

Safe Travel for People with Hidden Disabilities: [http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial\\_1374.shtm](http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds/editorial_1374.shtm)

Links about Travel for Individuals with Disabilities: <http://www.abledata.com/abledata.cfm?pageid=19337>

For access information/resources for mature travelers and travelers with special needs: <http://www.access-able.com/>

Information about cruising with a disabled: [CruiseCritic.com](http://CruiseCritic.com)

Listing of accessible travel specialists: <http://www.disabledtravelers.com/>

Resources and tips from disabled travelers: <http://www.globalaccessnews.com/>

News, fact sheets and destination access guides: <http://www.sath.org/>



### **Around the World. Around the Clock. American Citizens Services**

*The Bureau of Consular Affairs in the U.S. Department of State  
has no higher responsibility than safeguarding our country's citizens.*

To find out more about the services we provide, go to <http://www.travel.state.gov>